

Name: _____ Date: _____

COMMUNICATION ANXIETY

Do you get nervous or anxious before a speech or presentation? You're not alone. In fact, public speaking is a very common fear or anxiety. If you acknowledge your anxiety, anticipate some of the physical manifestations of it, and use some of the coping strategies listed below, you can overcome your fear and deliver an amazing speech!

When do we feel anxious communicating?

- In unfamiliar and novel situations
- With strangers or people who seem unlike us
- In situations involving evaluation
- With larger audiences
- In more formal situations
- In a non-native language
- When others have high expectations of our performance
- When we set high personal standards for ourselves
- To people of higher status than ourselves
- After we experience failure

Physical Manifestations of Communication Anxiety:

- Tightness in the throat and a dry mouth
- Frequent swallowing
- Weak knees
- Shortness of breath
- Cold hands
- Faintness or dizziness
- Sinking feeling in the stomach or abdomen
- Inability to focus
- A sense of confusion and disorganization
- Blankness of mind or blockages of memory
- Difficulty sleeping in the period leading to the communication event

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Coping Strategies: Before the Speech:

- Choose a topic with which you are comfortable
- Prepare thoroughly
- Concentrate on your introduction and conclusion
- Practice delivering and timing your speech
- Don't stop until you've reached the end of the speech
- Familiarize yourself with the setting and equipment
- Use visualization techniques to imagine an ideal presentation
- Get enough sleep the night before the speech event

Coping Strategies: During and After the Speech:

- Dress appropriately and comfortably
- Be on time to deliver the speech
- While waiting, tense and relax your hand, leg, and other muscles
- Before beginning, take a couple of deep breaths
- Concentrate on what you are saying instead of how you are saying it
- Concentrate on the audience instead of yourself
- Deliver the speech with outward signs of confidence
- Do not verbalize your anxiety
- If your mouth becomes dry, pause and take a swallow of water
- Recognize that even the best speakers make mistakes
- Use visual aids, which shift attention from speaker to speech and give meaningful actions to your hands
- Substitute larger controlled movements for fidgety uncontrolled ones
- Shift into positive self-talk if you feel lack of confidence
- Recognize that seemingly negative responses from the audience may have nothing to do with you
- If you panic, get past the moment
- After the speech, put the occasion into perspective by applying the "10-year rule" (i.e. think about how you/others in the room will remember this event remember tomorrow? In a week? In a month? In a year? In 5 years? In 10 years?)

Adapted from:

Ferguson, Sherry Devereaux. *Public Speaking in Canada: Building Competency in Stages*. Don Mills, ON: Oxford University Press, 2006. 24-36.